

When the Going Gets Tough,

Over the past couple of years, some companies have sacrificed employee training to conserve expenditures while times have been financially tough. However, the long-term gains of having trained employees should not be overlooked. Any costs incurred to train operators or administrative staff will be more than recovered by the amount of quality work produced, the satisfaction of the worker and the satisfaction expressed by customers. Many businesses have realized this, and are actually increasing their training programs in a down economy. The simple truth is that training is a “win-win” for employers. Many companies will testify that the rewards associated with employing highly skilled, well-trained personnel outweigh the costs of training.

In 2009, overall training expenditures by U.S. companies decreased by just seven percent from the previous year to \$52.2 billion, as stated in *Training* magazine's 2009 Industry Report. However, in the same report it states that 57 percent of the companies surveyed maintained the same number of training staff as the year before, and small companies of 10 to 999 employees were increasing training expenditure while allowing more hours for staff to be trained. In fact, these small companies more than doubled their amount of training hours per employee to an average of 33 hours in 2009.

The positive effects of training employees can be huge, whether the company is involved in contracting, manufacturing or distributing. These effects are not simply in terms of skill levels or profits, but also through raising employee morale and building a productive and healthy working

environment. Employees value the fact that employers see them as an investment. By investing in employees, an employer can develop people who will become great assets to the company. By using training or certification courses as a vehicle for growth and development, employees will be encouraged to remain focused and loyal to a company that is willing to invest in them and develop them as an industry professional.

There's a saying that, “you can't teach an old dog new tricks,” but this is not really true. Continuous advancements in engineering and technology mean that training is essential—no matter how experienced someone is in their chosen profession. New products are constantly being developed to improve a contractor's speed, efficiency, accuracy and safety, and it is up to employers to make sure that their employees are educated and skilled in these new products as they are introduced. Some industry professionals with more than 30 years of experience in their discipline will testify that they are still learning. While their experience is invaluable in most cases, the introduction of new tools and equipment can often place them in the same situation as a newly-hired employee. Training has no age limits.

To keep up with how quickly products and technologies advance, the methods with which employees are trained must also evolve and improve. At a time when employers are thinking “outside the box” as to how to cut back on costs, while still getting their operators sufficiently trained, the increasing popularity of online courses and webinars proves just that.

It goes without saying that there is no substitute for having hands-on training when it comes to increasing the skill and safety of employees, but the rapidly-evolving service of web-based training has given many employers a more cost-effective way of educating and informing their employees.

Training institutions continue to adapt course offerings in response to the ever-changing needs of the industries they serve. Tutelage is provided by industry experts, who share a wealth of information with students about their chosen discipline. By using proven, well-structured courses as a company training program, participants are assured of receiving top-notch instruction through the presentation of up-to-date best working practices.

Since 1993, Concrete Sawing & Drilling Association (CSDA) members from the U.S., Canada and around the world have been sending representatives to the association's training classes with the aim of enhancing or adding to the skill sets of their employees. Participants have discovered the benefits of being given quality training and take their newly-acquired skills back to their respective companies. The information and techniques presented enable participants to work with increased levels of accuracy and efficiency in their day-to-day roles, heightening the reputation of their company, improving safety records and showing customers that professionalism and safety are top priority.

“By sending our employees to structured training programs and having most operators become certified in their field, the company has been able to win more jobs and impress customers with the professionalism of our guys,” says Kellie Vazquez, vice president of



the Tough Get Training



Upcoming CSDA Training Sessions November 15-20, 2010

St. Petersburg College, Clearwater, Florida

- Estimating Class Nov. 16-17
- Certification Courses
 - Slab Sawing & Drilling 201 Nov. 15-16
 - Wall Sawing 201 Nov. 17-18
 - Wire Sawing 201 Nov. 19-20

The 201 Certification courses allow experienced operators to expand their knowledge and skills and become a CSDA Certified Operator in one or all of the sawing and drilling disciplines. The advanced courses provide classroom and hands-on instruction in slab sawing and core drilling, wall/hand/chain sawing and wire sawing.

Estimating focuses on the tasks involved with estimating sawing and drilling jobs. Employees with at least three years experience in the concrete cutting industry, those who wish to broaden their knowledge in the field of estimating or those looking to move into management should attend. The course outlines the role of an estimator, reviews different methods of estimating, compares estimates and actual costs and discusses how estimators affect the company's bottom line.

January 17-20, 2011

Las Vegas Convention Center, Las Vegas, Nevada

- Wall Sawing & Core Drilling 101 Jan. 17-20

This course includes classroom sessions and hands-on training in demonstration areas at the World of Concrete 2011 trade show and exhibition. The course provides students with a strong foundation in sawing and drilling operations and industry fundamentals, and is geared to both newly hired operators and anyone wishing to expand their knowledge of sawing and drilling.

For more information, call 727-577-5004 or visit www.csda.org and click on "Training," where a copy of the latest training brochure can be viewed or downloaded.

Holes Incorporated of Houston, Texas. "Our goal is to have all operators trained by the professionals at CSDA," she added.

Online courses offer flexible learning schedules that allow employees to complete the training at their own pace while continuing with their day-to-day duties. The employer can track progress and monitor the results at any time. The quality and quantity of online training has grown tremendously over the last five years, and has now become a viable option for many people. This statement is confirmed by *Training* magazine's 2009 Industry Report, which reports that although classroom-based training remains the preferred choice for 47 percent of the companies surveyed, almost 20 percent now use purely online classes, while another 23 percent use a mixture of hands-on and online training.

"It is a time saver for training new and existing employees at various branch locations," says Don Moroz of Derrick Concrete Cutting & Construction Ltd based in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Moroz is a firm believer in company training, in whatever form it is presented. The advancements in online training have benefited his company tremendously. "All employees receive the same training and can complete safety records at a press of a button. The classes can be easily changed or updated, and completing these classes can help protect



you and your company from potential claims," he added. With all the technological advancements present in today's society, it is becoming clear to many that online training is a great option if costs or employee time off are issues.

It is important to remember that training need not be limited to contractors, but can be extremely useful to other industry employees. Manufacturers and distributors of goods and services have found that training has enhanced the knowledge and skills of their workers. By gaining enhanced knowledge of the relevant tools and equipment, and learning how to get the best performance from them, employees are able to interact confidently with customers and use their firsthand knowledge to answer any questions about their company's products.

"We were expanding the business into the professional concrete cutting segment of the industry and wanted to get into the world of these contractors and understand it from their viewpoint," says Tom Esch of Esch Construction Supply, Inc., St. Paul, Minnesota. "By training alongside contractors and learning from industry experts, we know more about how best to help our customers lower costs and increase profits. We have important working knowledge about a specialized market that has helped both our customers and our sales. This is a double bonus, and in this economy we need such an advantage," Esch added.

This distributor of concrete sawing and drilling equipment has experienced the benefits of having trained employees with sound product knowledge gained from not just studying technical data sheets or instructions, but from performing cutting work with the types of tools and equipment the company sells.

Acquiring training from an official body also provides piece of mind for employers. Upon completion of training or certification courses, documentation is given to the employer to confirm their employees have demonstrated the necessary skills to pass the standards set and perform safe and efficient work. This documentation can assist in limiting a company's risk and liability, as written certification can be produced to prove a company's safe working practices and the skill sets achieved by its employees. Documentation can also help contractors win jobs

by showing potential customers that employees have attained a high standard in their chosen discipline. Evidence of training and certification is becoming an important part of a company's portfolio when bidding for jobs or presenting to potential customers. With the advancements in online training, it is now possible to acquire such documentation while sitting in your own home or office.

As previously mentioned, however, the accessibility of online training cannot compare to the opportunity to send employees on hands-on and classroom courses. Interaction with experienced trainers and other industry experts, and the chance to use and learn about the latest cutting equipment and techniques, is one resource that an employer is hard pressed to find anywhere else. Many organizations work with local training or educational facilities to provide the best possible environment in which to conduct training classes. This benefits both the facility and the organization, as attendees can be trained in a location dedicated to their discipline, and the educational facility can show students that professional organizations from their chosen industry use their location as a base for training. Students have a firsthand look at the work performed by the class attendees, while the attendees take advantage of being in an academic environment with modern equipment and facilities.



James Connolly, corporate training director for St. Petersburg College in Florida, has been working with CSDA for several years to provide top quality training at the college. He says, "In an economic downturn, the first items to be trimmed from a budget are generally research, development and training. What we have found is that the better an individual is trained the more prepared an organization is when a downturn occurs. Today, everyone is doing more with less, and an individual who is cross-trained can become much more efficient and functional."

There really is no downside to training. The gains from having employees trained or certified in their discipline cannot be ignored. By investing financially in an employee, an employer can experience the return of that investment through the increased knowledge, skill and efficiency of the employee. This will ultimately result in not only a financial gain, but a gain in employee morale and customer confidence; two factors that can be key to a successful business. The economy will improve once more, and when it does many companies will be a step ahead of the rest because their employees are trained and ready to take on new work.

Make plans now to send your new and experienced operators to the upcoming CSDA training classes.